



Senator Brian Weinstein

Assistant Majority Whip

END OF SESSION REVIEW

Sen. Brian Weinstein

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Committees:

- Judiciary, Vice Chair
- Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education, Vice Chair
- Transportation



Dear Neighbors,

When we came to Olympia in January, no lawmaker could predict just how successful – even historic – the 2006 legislative session would be.

This year, we made progress on some of Washington's most pressing issues:

- Giving students the resources they need to meet state academic standards.
- Expanding access to higher education.
- Protecting Puget Sound from pollution.
- Moving forward on cohesive regional transportation planning.
- Passing a responsible supplemental budget that invests in Washington's future.
- Extending health-care coverage to more low-income children and families.

I also was proud to vote for a long-overdue bill extending basic civil rights to our state's gay and lesbian citizens. Everyone deserves equal protection under the law, and this landmark bill was signed into law in January.

My top priority this session was ensuring that this year's 10th-graders are well-prepared to tackle the Washington Assessment of Student Learning. In today's competitive economy, our students must be able to demonstrate that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed beyond high school. You'll find details inside about the important steps we took to help students achieve academic success.

It's a pleasure to represent the 41st Legislative District, and I can do that best with your input. Please continue sharing your comments by calling or e-mailing my office.

Sincerely,

Sen. Brian Weinstein

Academic opportunities for every student

The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) was the hot education topic this session, as 10th-graders around the state are the first class required to pass the test to graduate.

As vice chair of the Senate Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education Committee, I took part in intense discussions with teachers, parents, students and other stakeholders. We all have a common goal: putting in place a comprehensive assessment system that will give students a chance to show what they've learned – and will give extra help to students who are struggling.

Washington Learns update

In 2005, I sponsored Senate Bill 5441, which called for a comprehensive review of Washington's public education system, including structure and funding. As a result of my bill, the Washington Learns committee under the leadership of Gov. Chris Gregoire has been working tirelessly to find ways to make Washington's early learning, K-12 and higher education opportunities the best in the nation. This means designing a system that prepares students to compete in a global economy.

While the panel's final report is due in November, it issued an interim report late last year with several valuable recommendations, including the creation of a state Department of Early Learning (see right). You can find more about Washington Learns at www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov.

Even with so much focus on the WASL this session, we also improved Washington's early learning and higher education opportunities. Among the education highlights from this year, we:

- Approved a menu of alternative assessments to the WASL for students who don't perform well on traditional tests. The alternatives will be available for students who have retaken the WASL at least once.
- Authorized an independent study to identify barriers to academic success, and additional ways to help students meet state standards.
- Earmarked \$28 million for extra instruction for students still working to pass the WASL.
- Boosted higher education accessibility by adding 500 enrollment slots, and authorizing Washington State University Tri-Cities to expand to a four-year school.

- Helped school districts by authorizing them to retain all funds collected from voter-approved levies. I sponsored the companion bill to House Bill 2812.

In such a great year for education, there were a few disappointments. I worked once again on a bill allowing a simple majority of voters to approve school district levies, but couldn't secure enough votes in the Senate. Also defeated was an attempt to authorize county property taxes for cost-of-living supplements to teachers who can't afford housing in the districts in which they teach (House Bill 1484). I'll be working on these measures again next session.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction has created a Web site devoted to WASL information. You can find it at <http://www.wasl2006.org/>.

Putting children on the road to lifelong learning

Children are born to learn. Research shows that the majority of brain development happens in the first years of life, and that high-quality early learning opportunities are among the very best investments we can make to reduce future costs in special education, abuse and neglect services, health care, high school dropout rates, teen pregnancy, and the criminal justice system.

This session, we affirmed the importance of this issue by creating a state Department of Early Learning to give parents better information about child care and preschool options in their communities. I'm proud that last year I sponsored Senate Bill 5441, which created the panel that recommended this new early learning department.



Protecting Washington's unique environment

We made targeted investments this year to protect Washington's air and water for future generations while easing our dependency on foreign oil.

- Switching to biofuels – energy made from crops and other farm products – is a winning situation both for our farmers and our environment. By the end of 2008, all automobile fuel sold in Washington must contain at least 2 percent biofuels.
- We also created the Energy Freedom Fund to provide low-cost financing for projects that promote the creation of renewable fuels, such as construction of facilities to convert farm waste into fuel.
- Thousands of computers, monitors and televisions are thrown away in Washington each year. Dangerous heavy metals are leaching from this "e-waste" into our ground and water supply. Senate Bill 6428 makes Washington one of the first states to set up a collection and recycling program for unwanted items, to be overseen by the state in partnership with electronics manufacturers.
- The budget includes \$57 million to help protect and revitalize Puget Sound.



Healthy communities, healthy state

My priority in health care this session was boosting payment rates for nursing homes to help them take care of our elderly citizens. The budget includes \$20 million in state and federal money to do just that. We took several other steps to help all of Washington's citizens stay healthy:

- Added 6,500 people to the state's health plan for low-income adults.
- Added 10,000 more children to the Immigrant Children's Health Program, working toward the Legislature's goal to provide health-care coverage to all Washington's children by 2010.
- Provided funding to assist low-income seniors in affording their prescription drug co-pays under the new federal Medicare Part D plan.
- Improved patient safety by reforming practices in the medical malpractice insurance market, and allowing doctors to apologize for medical errors without fear that it will be used against them in a lawsuit. While this is a step toward meaningful reform, we must do more to provide patients real protection from medical errors.

Keeping our roads moving forward

Regional Planning

Last year, the Legislature approved the Transportation Partnership Package, which provided funding for hundreds of projects necessary to keep Washington's transportation system safe and efficient. We built upon the transportation successes of 2005 this session by taking steps to make sure state transportation projects are kept on time and on budget.

We also approved a regional transportation bill (House Bill 2871) that requires Sound Transit and the Regional Transportation Investment Board (RTID) to jointly go to the ballot with their proposed projects no sooner than 2007. Further, the bill creates a commission to design a centralized governing body for regional transportation.

The tri-county region needs to work together to keep our roads moving while also investing in smart mass transit options. We must move forward with a mix of transportation choices if we want to keep our economy strong, our roads safe and our air clean.

Coal Creek Parkway

Locally, I worked this session in my position on the Senate Transportation Committee to secure funding to ease traffic gridlock on the Eastside. The state transportation budget includes \$4.7 million to complete improvements to the Coal Creek Parkway. This major alternative to Interstate 405 will become even more of a lifeline as I-405 reconstruction begins.

The project will:

- Widen the road.
- Make safety improvements such as better lighting and signals.
- Make environmental improvements to storm water management and fish passage.
- Replace the May Creek Bridge, which could be vulnerable to collapse in the event of another large earthquake.

The City of Newcastle has worked tirelessly for years to finish this project. With a mix of local, state and federal funding, the Coal Creek Parkway improvements are scheduled to be finished by mid-2008. It will be a big boost for Eastside commuters, pedestrians and bicyclists.

Looking ahead

Rights of homeowners

Although the next session is months away, I'm working on ideas to make the 41st Legislative District and Washington better places to live and work.

One of my goals for the 2007 legislative session is to help homeowners who are victims of negligent construction. When people invest their hard-earned money in a home, they deserve a well-constructed, safe building. Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen. Unscrupulous practices can lead to shoddy construction.

Especially in the Pacific Northwest — where tough weather demands well-built homes — the dream of owning a home should not turn into a nightmare of negligent construction. I look forward to introducing measures next session to clarify and strengthen the rights of homeowners.

I took the first step this session by sponsoring Senate Bill 6531, which helps protect homeowners by holding limited liability companies to their responsibilities even if they dissolve.



Gov. Gregoire signs Sen. Weinstein's bill to protect homeowners

Gun show loophole

With about 70 gun shows each year in Washington, we must make sure that the proper procedures are in place to ensure public safety. It is estimated that half of gun show sales in Washington are conducted without background checks of buyers.

Senate Bill 5343 would have required firearms dealers to perform background checks before selling or exchanging firearms at a gun show. While the bill had a public hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee, it did not reach a vote of the full Senate. I will be working next session to see that this common-sense measure moves forward.